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The Prophet of
Dakshineswar.

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THE PROPHET OF DAKSHINESWAR.

‘ Great men, taken up in any way, are profitable company,’ says Carlyle. Diffident as we are of doing justice to the full meaning of the life and mission of one of the greatest of India’s sons,* we still make the attempt to drink of a pure fountain of light and love in the hope that such attempt cannot but be beneficial. The advantages gained from the study of the life of a great man is sure to counterbalance all defects of delineation.

This ancient land of ours has many claims to be considered the chosen land and its people, the chosen people. No great man ever adorned the pages of its history unless he was a religious hero. Religious evolution like other kinds of evolution is not along a straight line but may be deemed to be a wave with its crests and hollows. The highest point in the crest of a wave may be said to mark the rise of a religious hero and the lowest point of the hollow, the depression to which Hindu society was reduced. A close study of the last four centuries of Indian history indicates an upturn of the wheel of progress.

The intellectual and religious activities of all nations may be said to be directed towards the formation of a suitable ideal and the bringing down of the ideal to the realm of practice. These two functions cannot be performed by one and the same class of men. Those who evolve out of themselves grand ideas are rare and few,

but those who preach and popularise these ideas are many and come into closer contact with the people. In the field of religion, the former are represented by prophets and the latter by priests. Prophets give birth to new ideas and priests popularise them and keep them alive. A new prophet always calls into existence a new order of priests. The priests of old ideas offer resistance to the spread of the new religion until both learn the practical wisdom of conciliatory coordination and the new wine is put into old bottle. But it has invariably happened that the new momentum acquired is in the direction of progress. Such has been the history of Indian religions.

Looking back into the history of ancient India, we find from very early times the existence of a similar struggle. On the one hand, we read in the Vedas, of Rishis seated in meditation and propounding solutions to the most abstract of problems regarding the ultimate goal of existence, on the other, we notice an hierarchy of priests chanting hymns to their favourite gods, offering sacrifices to propitiate them and praying for wealth and worldly prosperity. The *Rishis* of the *Jnanakanda* typify the originators of new ideas, and leaders of thought and progress, the *Purohitas* of the *Karmakanda* represent the conservers of hallowed customs and doctrines and the forces opposing expansion and new life. The struggle between these two factions, the conservative and the liberal, may be seen to have continued throughout the period of the *Brahmanas*. At the end of the *Aranyakas* a new force appears to have developed itself in the teaching of the *Upanishads* containing the quintessence of all that was old

in religion. In the *Upanishads*, while we find greater importance attached to knowledge and renunciation than to ritualism the latter is held to be an indispensable accessors to the former. The ecstatic seers of the *Upanishads* may, therefore, be said to mark the culminating point of the struggle so well noticeable in the *Vedas*.

It is no wonder that history often repeats itself. After the period of the *Aranyakas*, small attempts at progress are observable now and then, and luminous stars rise here and there above the religious horizon and guide the course of the weary and benighted traveller. When the wave of spiritual advancement gets clogged once again by the weighty accretions of conservatism and corrupt religious life, it loses itself in the cumbersome mass of ritualism and selfishness. Then a new impetus comes in with the rise of a great man, a mighty prophet, a holy saint, and new vigor is infused once again into national life. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Whenever virtue subsides, and wickedness raises its head, I create myself once again."

The advent of Buddha marks one such epoch in the history of mediæval India. Buddha found amongst his countrymen all kinds of corrupt practices. The hideous rites, meaningless rituals, and the selfish and unsympathetic acts, perpetrated in the name of religion were all to be put down and the eyes of the suffering masses should be opened to their follies and led once again in the righteous path of love and renunciation. Buddha was not unsupported in his accusations. We find the same charges hurled against corrupt ritualism in the manifold writings of Yajnavalkya and his followers. In pointing out the

degenerate practices of his predecessors, Yajnavalkya makes an attempt to purify and widen the field of ritualistic religion by the introduction of fresh and simple rituals and forms of worship. Buddha did not follow the plan of the much despised followers of the *White Yajus*. He adopted an altogether different course and tried to knock on the head of ritualism and worship and reconstruct religion on a purely ethical and philosophical basis. In doing this he entirely ignored the fact that no religion is capable of living without rituals, that no abstract idea can be understood by the common masses and realised in practical life without the help of concrete forms of worship. The consequence was that, not long after the ascension of Buddha, his teaching failed to produce the intended effect and to give sufficient impetus to the progress of religion. Worse kinds of corruptions than what existed before crept into the practices of the illiterate followers of Buddhism, and the noble religion of the prophet of Kapilavastu ceased to be a living force in the land of His birth.

The *Vedic Dharma* recovered once again from the stupifying blow given to it by the teaching of Buddha and began to be astir. Great *Acharyas*, like Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, arose and did the Herculean task of resuscitating the old religion once again. Nurtured in an alien soil, among ethnically different races, amidst new ideas and environments, these *Acharyas* had the keenness to perceive the defects of the old practices and at the same time realising their vocation worked against the reactionary influences of Buddhism. They gave fresh life to the noble religion of the *Upanishads* without in any way offending

the prejudices of the orthodox followers of the *Vedas*. The result was fresh blood was once more infused into the religion of the *Vedanta* so as to make it a living force. New and aggressive forces in the form of Mahommedanism and Christianity presented themselves and new kinds of prejudices and corruptions began to predominate and the conserving tendency of the high priests of religion began to tell injuriously against the growth of true religious ideas among the masses. Room was thus created for fresh reformers to arise and guide the trodden millions of this land.

All the Acharyas above mentioned were Southerners. Is it not the turn of Northerners to produce religious heroes? What had become of the people on the holy banks of the Indus and the Ganges the original home of the Aryans, where the ancient Rishis poured forth in sublime strains of joy the apocalyptic visions of their ecstasy? Had they been left to grope for ever in darkness covered with the darkness? Was the age of prophets gone for ever in the ancient home of the Aryans? Was there to be no fresh light from heaven to illumine the path of the doubting millions there? Was the *Sanatana dharma* to be driven out of the sacred land of *Aryavarta* by the aggressive forces of Mahommedanism and Christianity? Though circumstances did not favour the rise of great Acharyas from amongst them, our brethern of the North were not insensible to their wants and spiritual requirements. Signs there were that the soil was being prepared for the coming in of a great prophet. The new environment and the influx of new ideas created new religious cravings and the

people looked up to heaven for fresh light to dispel all darkness and to unite them under one common banner

The sweet odour from the teachings of the Southern *Acharyas* was wafted by the cool Southern breeze across the Vindiya range into the arid regions of the North. Great teachers like Ramanand, Kabir and Dadu carried the doctrine of love and renunciation and the chastened worship inaugurated by the Southern *Acharyas* to the North and paved the way for the rise of a reformed religion which was destined to give umbrage to countless millions. Though Christianity was not yet a recognised factor, they had much work in contending against the aggressive and vandalistic spirit of Mahommedanism. In spite of its cold-blooded acts of fanaticism and violence, it had the peculiar charm of implanting social solidarity and amelioration wherever its sword fell

About the middle of the 15th century there came the great teacher, Guru Nanak, an incarnation of love and wisdom. He attempted to restore religion to its pristine purity and popularise the noble religion of the *Upamshads* by translating the sacred books into the popular dialects, by framing new rules for the guidance of the conduct of his followers and prescribing chaste forms of religious worship. But he did not give them the necessary muscle to successfully combat the opposing force of Mahommedanism. This want was supplied by another teacher of his line, the last of the order of the ten *Sikh Gurus*. Guru Govind converted the religious *Sikhs* of the Punjab into the martial *Singhs*, the peaceful votaries of Nanak into the high-statured and mighty-limbed defenders of the

Sanatanadharma The work of the royal saint of the Punjab was not a solitary movement of its kind. A number of other sects arose in different parts of India and spread the new spirit of revival throughout the length and breadth of the North-Western Provinces.

The Hindu mind was no longer stagnant, it has been stirred by Islam. Ramanand and Goraknath preached religious equality, Chaitanya had repeated that faith levelled caste, Kubir appealed to the people in their own tongue and tried to unite the Hindus and Mahomedans in a larger synthesis, and Vallabha taught that effectual devotion was not incompatible with the ordinary duties of the world and Nanak laid the germs of an organization for the social amelioration and compactness of his race with which Govind fired his country men with a new national Spirit and gave a fuller application to the doctrines of Ramanuja and preached that the lowest is equal to the highest in political right as in religious hopes, that all must co-operate in the interest of the National Dharma. Such also seems to have been the result of the preaching of the Maharashtra saints. As the *Gnanamarga* of Sankara expressed itself in the Rajput chivalry so the *Bhakti-marga* of Ramanuja gave birth to the martial spirit of the Sikhs. About the beginning of the 17th century we hear of the rise of such religious sects as the *Babulals*, the *Sadhus*, and in the 18th century, such others as the *Satnamis*, the *Nagapantis* and the *Vitals*.

The main use of many of these sects was to counteract certain signs of degeneration observable among particular denominations of people but not to universalise the basic

principles of religion and make religion take a stronger hold on the heart of the people. One of the results of these movements was, the multiplication of new sects and the perpetuation of differences. Though all big organisations come out of small beginnings, there is the danger of the universal spirit of religion becoming lost before large social bodies are reared out of small ones. The successful working of a principle always implies the fanaticism and zeal on the part of its followers. But fanaticism and bigotry are altogether antagonistic to reason and judgment and progress in the right direction. However numerous and successive were the sects that grew, their activities were confined to a limited number of people and did not benefit the larger masses who were in greater need of sympathy and religion than the classes. They, on the whole proved ineffective, in the matter of raising a universal platform whereon the various sects and forms of worship can meet.

While the Indian Society was thus struggling for existence, while the national mind was thus straying away from the fundamental doctrines of the ancient religion of the Aryans, a new force presented itself in the form of Christianity. It showed neither doctrinal superiority over the national religion of the Hindus nor new and agreeable forms of presentation of its fundamental principles to the people, but tried to identify itself with material prosperity. Thus there arose an additional necessity for opening the eyes of the people who were getting dazed with the glitter of European civilisation.

At the end of the 19th century there arose a great *Sannyasin* teacher, Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He was a

man of learning and energy and endowed with a great power of organisation. He had a tall and stately figure and a countenance beaming with spirituality. He was able to grasp the situation of Hindu society in the land of the five rivers and understand that the labours of his predecessors were only to preserve the true spirit of Hindu religion but not to unify the differences due to form and rituals. His plan of campaign was to destroy the differences and place society on a solid basis. With this end in view, he went to work on the veneration which the Hindus possessed as a nation to the *Vedas*. He said that the *Vedas* were undying and eternal and, being from God, infallible and that they treated of the laws ruling the universe of matter and mind. His endeavour was to knock on the head of overgrown ritualism and substitute in its place the primitive rites of the *Vedas* as the only true rites fit to be practised by the Aryans. He emphasised on the old and inspiring doctrines of the immortality of the soul and reincarnation but tried to throw overboard some of the forms, such as, idolatry caste, early marriage &c, which had begun to be thought objectionable by the masses under the influences of Mohammadanism and Christianity. His favourite saying is reported to be that Christianity, Mohammadanism Purnicism and Jainism have corrupted the Hindu religion. As it is very difficult to root out prejudices which have become part of a people's life and as the act of replacing meant considerable time and great struggle, his movement cannot be considered to have become as successful as it ought to be. The moment the influence shed by his powerful personality and erudite scholarship was withdrawn, the edifice

built by the founder of the Arva-samaj began to suffer, and petty differences in regard to doctrines crept into their midst and sowed seeds of dissension. The Arya Samaj could not spread in other parts of India perhaps because of its want of a strong doctrinal basis, its arbitrary exposition of the Vedas, and its too strong identification with social reform.

To turn our attention to the state of affairs in the fertile valley of the Ganges, here too, there seems to have been a continuous struggle to revive the purity of religion for the last five centuries. The forces that worked here were slightly different from those that operated in Western India. Unlike the West, Sanskrit learning was not confined to the *Sannyasins*. The centre of *Nyaya* learning was transferred during the last few centuries from Mithila to *Nadea* in Bengal. A number of teachers of great repute like Gadhadhar and Jagadis arose and kept up the prestige of this seat of learning. But the lower masses were steeped in ignorance, and people were anxiously looking for new light. Eastern Bengal became a luxuriant soil for the growth of all sorts of *Vamacharas*. The lower strata of people began to seek social freedom by yielding to the influences of Mohammedanism. At this juncture, the influence of the Southern *Acharyas* reached the sacred banks of the Ganges. About the end of the 15th century, *Nadea* gave birth to one of our great sages—Bhagavan Sri Krishna Chaitanya. History teaches us that many of the attempts by reformers to rectify the corruptions of *Saktatism* was by *Vaishnavising* it, because *Saivism* in any form was much mingled with *Saktatism* and could not prove a successful means of purifying *Saktatism*. Bhagavan

Chaitanya is a reformer of the *Vaishnava* order of religion. Another reason may also be adduced to this. The philosophy of *Nadea* had always a partiality for the doctrines of *Vaishnavism*. Born in the citadel of *Nyaya* philosophy and himself a scholar of great repute, it is natural that Sri Chaitanya became the orthodox exponent of the religion of the *Bhagavata* school.

The purity of his life, the nobility of his character, the largeness of his heart, and his spiritual realisation made him the hero of the people and highly venerated. His teachings tended to a large extent to elevate the condition of the masses and give them a purer form of religious worship but did not do much towards rooting out the corruptions in the popular religion of the land. All that Chaitanya did was to utilise the deep-rooted devotional instincts of the people and the adoption of non-*saktaic* doctrines and rituals foreign to the regions of the Gangetic delta. A large majority of the lower classes and a small minority of the respectable people of Bengal readily embraced the new cult, while the bigoted followers of the old religion of the land did not shake off their prejudices but looked with favour the apparently dualistic doctrines of the prophet of *Nadea*. The work of social amelioration and religious reform may not therefore be said to have been perfected by this new movement, though many Mahomedans and low class Hindus became zealous devotees of the new religion.

By this time the struggle between Eastern and Western ideas for supremacy might be said to have become keen in Bengal, and the demon of denationalisation

began to possess the hope of Bengal. The social laws and religious customs of the Orient were looked upon as barbarous by the English-educated young men, while the orthodox section of the people cast an eye of suspicion on those cultured in Western learning as elements dangerous to social and religious peace. While thus situated, there came to the rescue a great leader, learned in the wisdom of both the East and the West, in the person of Rajah Ram Mohan Roy. He had the sagacity to perceive that society and religion cannot progress unless it is rebuilt on the common and universal principles of religion. He found that more or less the same truths pervaded almost all the religious sections and can be traced to the teachings of the *Upanishads*. The rituals only served to hide them and keep them from the sight of the masses. He did not realise the importance of reconciling the differences in ceremonial practices. He exaggerated some of the evils in Hindu society and his reformatory zeal very possibly told on his religious enthusiasm. He therefore thought that so long as sectarianism and the differences in observances could not be killed social consolidation was not possible. His policy was to give up all cumbersome and antiquated ritualism and follow the pure doctrines of the *Upanishads* with only a few set forms of worship of the *Bhakti* or devotional type. His attempt to separate religion from ritualism, doctrines from concrete practices, is but a repetition, in a modified form, of what Buddha did, the separation of Dharma from Moksha. Only Ram Mohan Roy, while calling upon his followers to worship and adore "the eternal, unsearchable, immutable Being, who is the

Author of and Preserver of the universe denounced idolatry though he showed great tolerance towards idolatrous worship. His attitude towards Christianity was very sympathetic. He treated it more as a system of ethics rather than as a historical revelation of God. So much was he for the absolute simplicity of the divine nature that even the idea of the Christian Trinity was to him polytheism. However insufficient the spiritual equipment of Rām Mohan Roy may be to be the founder of a new form of faith there is no gainsaying it that he was an intellectual giant and the father of the ferment now observable in Hindu Society. It was the galvanic shocks that he and Keshab Chander Sen dealt it that roused the sleeping leviathan.

The death of its founder was a severe blow to the Brahmo Samaj. Debendra Nath Tagore became its accredited leader and gave it an organisation. As more members joined its fold attempts were made to suit the tenets of the Adī Brahmo Samaj to different temperaments. While throwing overboard the Vedas it did not cut itself off from national and traditional customs nor follow Christ. At this juncture the gifted Keshab Chander Sen appeared on the scene. His personality, his earnestness and his eloquence made him the idol of the educated Hindu. The Brahmo Samaj became for a time very popular. A few quotations from Keshab will make his position clear. "The germs only and the germs not merely of the religion of the Brahmo Samaj, but of Christianity, Hinduism, Mahamadanism alike, are intuitions." The society 'is subjective, it endeavours to convert outward facts into facts of

consciousness. It believes that God is an objective reality. Jesus is simply a spirit to be loved, a spirit of obedience to God that must be incorporated in our spiritual being. Keshab tried to make the Samaj more and more eclectic whatever may be the meaning given to that term. It may not mean collection but the unification of truth. Still it is eclecticism. Whatever might have been the defects in the teachings of Keshab Chander Sen there is no denying the fact that he was a great and a good man. Of a high order of intelligence, he had the unique gift of discerning greatness and goodness in others even though it might be concealed from all ordinary eyes. His attachment to the Prophet of Dakshineswar and to Pavanahari Bava is sufficient evidence in support of our statement. The influence exercised by the former on the life of Keshab Chander is now a matter of history. We have reasons to believe that the influence was still greater than is generally admitted. However many educated youths of Calcutta went to hear the Prophet of Dakshineswar, because he was so much respected by Keshab Chander Sen. As is natural with all movements, schisms came into existence and some of its followers even reverted to the old state of affairs. To-day we have three different schools of Brahmos,—the *Adi Brahmasamaj* or the old dispensation, the *Sadharana Brahmo Samaj* or the ordinary dispensation and the *Navavidhana* or the new dispensation. Like the work of the 'rya samajis in the West, the work of the *Brhamo* movement ceased to be an expansive force even in the land of its birth. They are recognised to-day chiefly as a set of social reformers.

It appears to us that each movement we have briefly traced has a place in the religious history of India, a history which has still to be written in a spirit of sympathy and true insight. The birds-eye-view we have tried to take of the history of religion in India reveals it to us as a mighty Ganges taking its source on the snow-capped Himalayan heights, 'winding its way across meadows and valleys, ravines and crevasses, now rushing with impetuous force, now sluggish, but always imparting to the landscape its general tone, lending life to it and feeding the soil.

The future is always the fulfilment of the past and with the hour cometh the man. The period when the Brahmo Samaj divided against itself was just the time for a new prophet to arise who was a spiritual embodiment of all that the leaders of the Samaj had intellectually realised. This prophet was from among the worshippers of Kali—the Prophet of Dakshineswar, for the Temple-Garden of Dakshineswar near Calcutta was the scene of his early life and teachings.

Born of an orthodox Brahmin family in a wayside village of Bengal our sage inherited all the virtues of Indian rural life. His parents were pious, hospitable and loving. There was not one family in the surroundings of Kumarpukur which did not have opportunities of appreciating the virtues of Kudram Chatterjee and of his devout, simple and noble wife. There are many now living who had personal acquaintance with them and who talk of their many virtues. Though poor, they would not hesitate to starve a whole day to help a poor man.

Gadhadhar—this was the name of our hero in his

boyhood—was the youngest of three brothers. Unlike the ordinary run of humanity he exhibited very peculiar characteristics from his childhood. His body, his mind, his whole nature, had something marvellous about them. The intellectual glow that beamed from his face from his childhood indicated that no ordinary thoughts kept the mind of this boy busy. The impressionableness of his nature from his boyhood showed the extra-ordinary sensibility which characterised him. A story of his boyhood is that when his elder brother chastised him once, saying that he would vomit blood for his misbehaviour, he took this so much to heart that he actually began to vomit blood. His brother had to forgive and apologise to him to stop it. All the Puranic stories which the boy heard, were not mere stories to the boy but actualities which he tried to put to practice and realise in his play. Not only did what he heard and saw impress him strongly but also the very thought of others acted on him like an electric shock. Not infrequently in his younger days, his friends were surprised to see the boy whenever they thought of him. “Think of him intensely the boy was sure to be with you.” In fact, there was nothing like ideas separate from life to this wonderful boy. It is no wonder that such a boy should have been the father of the adult Sage and Prophet—Rama-krishna Paramahansa. Sister Nevedita referring to this period of his life says, “That his original physique must have been extraordinary, we can infer, since it stood the strain under which his religious yearning hurried it, for fifty three years. But far more wonderful was the complexity and many-sidedness of his character and of

development that made him feel the perplexities of every heart as if they were his own. His was probably the one universal mind of modern times."

Before our hero was very old, the boy was sent to school. Hardly was he a student for a few days, when he felt that the best things which high learning could bring were but a few paltry presents. So he stopped from going to school any more. At this time his father died and he tried to eke out his livelihood. He went to Dakshineswar near Calcutta and became the priest in the temple of the Goddess, *Kali*. Though this profession also he was ultimately destined to give up, it served to determine the whole trend of his life, to give direction to the highest aspirations of his heart. The religious songs of his country which he was accustomed to hear from his infancy taught him that the goal of human life was the realisation of God. The idea of realising God, therefore, took firm hold of the boy and, he consecrated the rest of his life to this one purpose. "How to realise Mother who, the sages say, lives in everything, in my own heart, in my own self" became the one idea that haunted him day and night. He was constantly absorbed in this one thought and often neglected temple worship, and even when forced to perform it, he did it mechanically without understanding what he did. People called him mad, and the *Sannvasin* teacher of his said in reply "All are mad in this world. Some are mad after wealth, some after power, some after carnal appetites, some after God. If drowning is to be the fate of man, it is better to be drowned in an ocean of milk than in a pool of filth." He could not conduct the

worship of the temple any more, He therefore gave it up and entered the adjoining wood and lived there

For twelve years from this time his life may be said to be one of intense struggle and yearning after true *Jnana*. During this period he underwent many kinds of discipline mentioned in the sacred books of the East as requisite for an aspirant after religious realisation. The ease and readiness with which he mastered some of the most difficult practices, his instinctive perception of the inner truths of the science of religion made people gaze at him with wonder, and consider him to be a man different from ordinary mortals. Those who came in close contact with him, in his after life, do not hesitate to say that he needed none of those things for himself but the mission of his life required that he should pass through all this discipline in order to prove to the world the efficiency of religious discipline as a means towards realisation. His life was not for himself but for those who struggle for the attainment of universal life.

Deep yearning to realise truth, to see God, is the first requisite in an aspirant after religious freedom. While he was suffering from the agony of not seeing God, while his whole mind was set on this one purpose, he often lost all sensations of the external universe. Swami Vivekananda says "About that part of his life he has told me many times that he could not tell when the sun rose or set, some times for weeks he had no other idea, only tears would trickle down his cheeks, and that one prayer come out, "Do thou manifest the Self in me, Thou Mother of the universe. See that I want Thee and nothing else." He

had learnt from books that Mother appears not to those who have not renounced the world and that above all, two things ought to be shunned by a seeker after God,—wealth and lust. His next attempt was to carry out these. He threw away what little property he had and took a vow never to touch money. With a man of his nature, an idea meant making it part and parcel of his whole system. He so far carried out this idea that every cell of his body developed a high kind of consciousness, so much so, that in later life even while in trance, we are told, if a coin were applied to any part of his body that portion would shrink and indicate resistance.

Renouncing sex-idea is much more difficult than renouncing wealth. The Hindu religion teaches us that the soul is sexless. He who wants to realise the soul should rise above this sex-idea. The sex-idea is not in itself harmful. But making it symbolise lower nature is against the cardinal principles of religion. Indian Gods are always represented with a consort. Such a representation is not to be confounded with ordinary worldly ideas. The God symbolises the *Purusha* or Divine spirit, and his consort represents *Prakriti* or Nature. The union of these two is the cause of the whole manifested universe. The Supreme Self is that which is behind and beyond this two-fold distinction of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the male and the female principles of creation. Viewing this Supreme Self as the Mother, every woman symbolises the Universal Mother whose love to her children is the surest means of Salvation. Our prophet was married early in life chiefly with a view to cure him of his unworldliness. Marriage also has its

lessons to teach His marriage with Sarada Devi, was, as will be seen, destined in the end to become the means of teaching the grandest of lessons to humanity When he went to her to obtain her consent to pursue the object of his heart, for on this depended his future happiness, to his surprise he found that the same spirit which vibrated in his bosom equally vibrated in hers also She said, "Go and accomplish thy work, devote thyself to the worship of God" She came to him in after life and became his disciple and is now highly venerated by his disciples Indian History teaches us that women have often become great religious teachers We need only refer to the names of Mira Bhai and Sahaji Bhai of historic celebrity

Thus he got rid of all those worldly attachments which according to his religion stood between him and the realisation of his Mother, and began to continue his struggle with redoubled earnestness So tremendous and persistent was his yearning that on many days a little food used to be thrust into his mouth by one of his relatives without his being conscious of it Though intense desire on the part of a practitioner is the first requisite, progress and attainment cannot come without proper initiation and direction by competent persons His earnestness was so great, his struggle so sincere, that teachers came to him of their own accord and gave the necessary instructions First, there came to him a beautiful young *Sannyasini*, learned in the mystical lore of the East, lived in the adjoining temple at Dakshineswar for some years, watched over him as a guardian angel would, and initiated him into many of the mysteries of practical religion Then came

another *Sannyasin*, learned in the *Vedanta* and initiated him into the practice of *Yoga* and Vedantic discipline. Ramakrishna learnt from him the true meaning of Vedantic worship and joined his order.

The various trials and troubles he underwent during this period of practice not only serve as an object-lesson to those coming after him but also confirm the truths embodied in the experiences of the great sages who preceded him. In the course of his struggle he had to pass through several crises, each one of which would have sunk frailer boats had not knowing pilots come to him in the nick of time and saved him from danger. Once he was redeemed from the demon of hunger just at a time when his vitality was waning away. At another time his eyes became fixed on the sun and he lost all bodily consciousness. As the sun rose or set his whole body became twisted and distorted and kept facing the sun. A *Sadhu* perceived that a great soul was passing away uncared for, so, rudely belaboured him with a cudgel till he was brought back to worldly consciousness. In referring to this period of his life, Sister Nivedita says "Driven by his own nature, impelled from within by that irresistible necessity that had called him into being, without one rest or relaxation, for twelve long years at least, he persisted in that inner warfare. Then, at last the goal was attained. The Mother revealed herself. From that moment his personality was that of a little child satisfied that he was in her arms."

Tradition says that the place where great men attain *Samadhi* or realisation is holy. Even angels fear to tread

such a place Buddha attained *Nirvana* under a Bo tree. Immediately after his beatific vision it is said that the tree was struck down by lightning. A similar occurrence is mentioned in connection with the place of *Samadhi* of our prophet. All associations of the *Sadhana* period of his life cluster round a great banyan tree. His disciples point out the pious pilgrims in this holy place a broken branch which has taken fresh root in the soil and say that nature has conspired to cover the spot where the holy man attained realisation. A small grove of five trees, known in *Sanskrit*, as *Panchavati*, with a strong elephant creeper swinging from one of the large branches of the banyan, mark this spot. A few yards in front, is a small room built of brick and chunam, standing in the place of the thatched hut where the sages struggle first began.

The secret of his success may be ascribed to the intensity of character which formed a part of his nature from early childhood. The two words, 'impossible' and 'idea,' may be said not to belong to his world. Whenever he made up his mind to do a thing, nothing daunted him, he could not rest until he achieved his object. In his estimation all theories and ideas were of no value unless they were actually realised. In Indian calendars, it is customary to calculate and record the probable quantity of rain that would fall during the year. He used to say that theories and learned disquisitions are like rain predictions in the calendar. Once he said "Take the calendar and squeeze it in your hand will there be a single drop of rain? No amount of talk and theorising will make you religious. Religion is realisation."

He had a peculiar genius for getting at the secret of everything. Whenever he wanted to overcome an obstacle, "to break a disposition", to master an idea, he instinctively knew how to direct his forces. He would at once reduce it to a concrete instance and combat it there. It was in this way that he cleansed himself of every tint of worldliness which obscured the shining in supreme splendour of the Divine Self within. The desire to be rid of social pride entered him once, and he could not rest in peace until he cleansed the dirtiest corner of a Pariah's hut with his long and flowing tuft of hair. After the attainment of supreme Beatitude, his naturally sensitive constitution became still more sensitive, became still more delicate and his keen love for the Self in all grew so intense that even an insignificant incident told on him with very great effect. We are told that when any body trod heavily on the grass in his presence he used to say that he felt as if he was trodden on his heart. The idea of unity was so strongly implanted in him that he could not brook the sight of a paper being torn in his presence. The idea of freedom became so much ingrained in his nature that he could not brook to see a knot. The news of another's suffering was enough to upset him. So great was this man's love and fellow-feeling for even the smallest of things that he would have gone through hundreds of births to save a poor being from a little suffering.

All the practices hitherto gone through by him were in accordance with the common and accepted methods based on the universal principles of the religion of his land. Though he realised, through these established means of his

religion, the rapture of eternal union with the Divine Nature within, and perceived the whole nature as Himself, his yearning did not cease with this, his mission was not yet completely fulfilled. A strong desire to dive deep into the secrets of other religions seized him. He wanted to investigate what was true in other religions.

A Mahommanden sage appeared on the scene then, lived with him and got him initiated into the truths of Mahommedanism. After going through the rites and observances of this religion, he came out with the conviction that the same goal is reached through it though by a different path. So also was it with Christianity.

These do not end his practices. There were many elements in human life which were the means of bringing consolation to the innumerable religious sects of his own people. A craving to realise God as the votaries of these sects would do, next set his spirit in motion. So, he took one by one each of these sects, popular in his days, and followed their customs and manners of worship. He dressed himself like them, ate like them, and lived like them until he made every detail of his life like theirs, until he reached the goal. He now imitated the sweet love of the *Gopi's* to Sri *Krishna*, dressed himself like a *Gopee* and decked himself with jewels and sat hours and days together longing for the absent lover. At another time he imagined himself as the mother of the Infant God (*Balagopal*) and would be absorbed in the manifold cares of a mother to her beloved child. He could not brook to see his beloved boy hungry, he could not see him suffer. He would even go to the extent of chastising him for disobeying the

loving injunctions of a kind mother. He was sometimes Hanuman, the devoted servant of Rama. At this period he used to spend his time on the tops of trees, eating fruits, and always repeating *Ram, Ram*. Varied and many were the practices to which he subjected himself about this period and realised God through all these forms. It is impossible, in the limited space at our disposal, to pourtray the many-sidedness of his religious realisation and the universality of his mind during this preparatory period of his wonderful life. There are many things in it which are not for the vulgar gaze. Suffice it to say, that there are at least three prominent landmarks in it which every student of his life cannot overlook. The first is his life of incessant action, the second that of incessant and intense realisation and discovery, and lastly that of pouring out the gathered treasure to the varied wants of humanity. Forty years did he thus spend in preparing himself for his life's mission.

The little that we have said about this marvellous person, prophet, sage is enough to show that his was a universal spirit which could not be confined within the narrow limits of a single sect. 'He came not to destroy but to fulfil the law'. His life was a lofty ideal for all. He took away nobody's faith but gave faith to everyman and woman of whatever creed and of whatever denomination. A great man once said of him that he waited for six long years to find out whether there was anything holy in the man, but at last he found out that the man was not holy but that he was holiness itself.

He never spoke or did anything, it was his Mother

who was the living force within, that propelled him to talk and act. Though it is sixteen years since he passed away, yet the words that fell from his lips make us feel as though to-day we are moving in his presence. To those that went to him, he often spoke in parables and metaphors as many a teacher before him has done. A modern writer very rightly remarks, "when the seer is rapt by supernal vision and has truly something to reveal, it can find no adequate expression in a sphere devoted to thoughts quite alien to itself, thoughts on a different level from its own, it flies to hide itself in concrete things, that taken one by one, seem to contain some distant reminiscences of, or correspondence to, each facet of the luminous vision he sees. These symbols, parables and metaphors convey in some remote, dim, but definite manner the form of the seer's waking dream.

"The man whose eyes have been opened hath uttered it,
He hath uttered it who heard the words of God,
And knew the knowledge of the Most High,
Who saw the vision of the Almighty,
Falling into a trance and having the veil withdrawn from
his eyes

To a superficial observer Ramakrishna was a puzzle. To those who studied him deeply he was an ideally perfect man. He was love itself, goodness itself, simplicity itself. His was a fine artistic taste and his criticisms on works of art used to be very sound. In every department of knowledge, he excelled all those that came in contact with him. He was the outcome of the necessity of the age. He did not teach any new doctrines, he did not

institute new rituals , he did not organise any new society His whole life was the one solution to all the problems that agitated men's mind He showed to the world that holiness and purity do not form the exclusive property of any one person, creed or religion, but that they belong to all alike and that true religion does not consist in written books, or delivering lectures, but consists in the life one leads and the realisation that one has He also taught, by example, that the different religions and institutions of the world are not contradictory , they are different phases of one and the same Eternal Truth and that so long as differences in human nature continue to exist, variety of practices are also necessary In him all sects find a meeting place The Dvaitin, the Visishtadvaitin and the Advaitin as well as the adherents of other faiths will find in him a centre towards which to converge and give up all quarrelling He taught that what is good in other religions must be assimilated into the one best suited to one's temperament His was a marvellous form of faith without any trace of fanaticism , his was perfect *Jnanam* and not mere dry intellectualism , his was a wonderful and noble kind of love and not mere meaningless sentimentalism His life was a perfect harmony of all these Says his great disciple, 'It is an extraordinary *searchlight* under whose illumination one is able to understand the whole scope of the Hindu Religion He was the *object lesson* of all the theoretical knowledge we get from the *Sastras* He showed by his life what the Rishis and the Avatars really wanted to teach Books teach mere theories He was a realisation. In *one* life of fifty four years he lived the

eight thousand years of national spiritual life and raised himself as an *object lesson* to future generations. The *Vedas* can only be explained and the *Sastras* reconciled by his theory of *Avasthas* or stages.

This one man will be an eternal proof that the old Indian wisdom was not in vain and that it will live for ever to bring consolation and peace to the suffering humanity in all lands. For, his life did not typify India alone but was an expression of the life of all mankind, the thought and feeling of all nations. This illiterate village Brahmin of Bengal is a living power which was confined not many years ago to a small portion of Calcutta and now clasps, in its embrace, the whole of the civilised world. What its future possibilities are, time alone can show. In the meanwhile, with Ramakrishna Paramahansa and other beings like him as our ideal let us try to follow the poet's advice.—

“ Grow perfect ! bide thy time ! in thine own being
 Solve, by an actual test, the problems vast
 That vex mankind, and, if the years are fleeing,
 Wait patiently. Backward the shadow passed
 Once at a prophet's word, and may for thee,
 Nay, will, if thou from self art perfect free
 Be chaste ! be true ! be wholly consecrated
 To virgin right ! So shall thy soul unchain
 The powers that for the perfect man have waited

New heavens of light shall dawn, the mind enskying ;
 Age shall de cease and youth revive the frame ;
 And from the desert where men thought thee dying,

Thou shalt return, flushed with celestial flame
Move as the air moves, rich with summer spice,
O'er fields of tropic bloom
As sunshine through the summer's green seclusion ,
As music, when its haunting powers are rife,
Through all pure instruments and voices sweet ,
Thou shalt attract them as the summer's heat
Calls bloom into the woodlands ,
God's breath, impulsing through thy sacred bosom,
Shall stir full many a heart with ecstasy

SRI RAMAKRISHNA.

Whenever *Dharma* subsides, and *adharma* prevails I come again and again, to protect the virtuous and destroy the wicked I subject Myself to the cycle of births and deaths declared the Lord in the Gita. Whenever human institutions fail to encompass human aspirations, whenever, the ideals of a people are incongruous with the forms they are clothed in, the Lord incarnates to restore the harmony. Every civilization is a dream of thousand years, a building up of a series of ideas in which God and Nature conspire to bring about the far off divine event towards which the whole creation moves. In the history of every nation there are certain privileged epochs in which every branch of human development 'attains perfection without effort by a kind of spontaneous instinct. At these 'divine hours great things come to pass, by the cooperation of a thousand hidden forces in which great souls find a flood of admiration and sympathy to sustain them'. The history of a nation is therefore the history of these inspired geniuses who are the embodiments of World-building ideas. With the change of time ideas outgrow the temporary conventions created to preserve and express them. In the evolution of the universe wherever there is such a disparity between the form and the essence of things there *adharma* is said to prevail. *Dharma* then means wearing the apparel of environment fittingly, it may be defined as universal harmony,—the divine within moving in harmony with

all that is divine without. The intellectual and religious activities of all nations is a perpetual struggle directed towards the formation of suitable ideals and bringing them down to the realm of practice. The world progresses by the projection of the *Atman* on the plane of phenomenal activity and its self-realisation in a series of great ideals, but the accomplishment of an Ideal is itself its dissolution and the beginning of a newer one, and the production of another *World-Spirit*. Buddha, Sankara, Ramanuja, Chaitanya and Ramakrishna are all such types. They indicate the throbbing of the Cosmic Spirit with which they are in communion on the plane of the physical world. Every act that we do, every thought that we think, leaves an impression on the mind, the sum total of these impressions or *Samskaras* is that tremendous force called character. Out of myriads of little struggles a great character is built. Every thought, every movement, every little aspiration of the human head and heart are gathered up, focussed, unified, and made vocal by the Blessed Ones of history. Great personalities are the language, the clear expression of the confused and indefinite consciousness of the popular mind. We have already said that Ramakrishna was such a personality.

What then was the trend of Hindu thought, of which Ramakrishna was the fullest embodiment? What were the conditions that gave him birth, the problems which his great life interprets for us? To comprehend the full meaning of this life a brief survey of the march of Hindu thought and history and the forces operating in and through it will not be out of place here.

Scarcely had Buddhism been assimilated, and national continuity established, scarcely had Sankaracharya restored the Religion of Tathagata to the historic consciousness of the race, and before India could raise a new structure on the god-making teachings of the Advaita, when a new force of unknown magnitude appeared on the horizon of Hindustan. Gathering up to its bosom Arab chivalry and Persian poetry and Saracenic art Islam invaded India. What is the great Idea for which Islam stands and what is India's indebtedness to it? For the first time within the hearing of Europe Mahammadanism proclaimed an idea of nationality based on a truer conception of the brotherhood of man. A variety of religious creeds can live together peacefully without weakening the sense of national unity. "The believers only are brethren, therefore make peace between two brothers. The noblest of you in God's sight is he who most feareth God." Christian, Sabian or Jew, whoever believeth in God and his good works is a fit citizen. Another idea that Islam brought to India is the democratic spirit in religion which they inherited from their Semetic ancestors, and the election of religious heads by popular suffrage and the delegation to them the right of interpreting the Koran. The characteristic which essentially distinguished the theocratic races of Western Asia is that they subordinated individual inspiration in religion to the dogmatic powers of an organized church. It is with this powerful instrument that the great Akbar tried to unite the Hindus and Mohammadans together. And what is India's indebtedness to it? The great Swami Vivekananda used to say that whenever he met a

Mahammadan in the streets of India he used to bow to him Why so ? because Mahammad is not merely the defender of a true faith but also the defender of Asiatic civilization In the struggle between the East and the West of which the crusades are but an outward expression, if the prophet had not raised out of the sturdy Arabs an iron wall of defence and prevented the barbarian inroads into Asia, the battles that were fought in Palestine would perhaps have taken place in the heart of Asia, in India Indian progress and civilization would have been arrested , and all those noble ideas of which the Hindu is now proud would have had no time for full development But what of Islamic vandalism in India ? It is only the temporary aberration of the the martial spirit roused in the great act of self-defence, as in the case of the soldiers of the French revolution after their return from the American War of Independence This divine Islamic storm swept away all that was weak in Hinduism, destroyed many a misgrowth of the settled national life and prepared the soil for another great epoch of constructive activity Wherever the sword of Islam smote, there the nation became more virile and a national sentiment began to develop Thus arose the *Maharashtra Dharma* and the Sikh *Wha Goorukı Fateh* By the time a stable dynasty was established on the throne of Delhi Islam became a sect of Hinduism The Great Akbar and his sons became semi-Hindus Derasukha became a *Satnamı* Amongst the Hindus a great movement was initiated for the assimilation of Islam and the ideas it stands for by the great Ramanuja He attempted to elevate all classes by the emphasis he laid on the

doctrine of Bhakti. Even pariahs were given some right of worship in the temple at Melkote. Constructive co-ordination and not destructive conversion which is the method of Hinduism in dealing with other religions. Tulukka Nachchars or Mahommadan Bhaktas of God, who were later on considered as God's consorts were installed in some of the temples of Southern India. These divine marriages symbolize the fusion of the two religions and serve to develop the feeling brotherhood. This movement was carried to its legitimate and logical conclusion by his successors of the North, Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak, and Dadu. It is a current proverb there, that to be born in a sect is good but to die in it is narrowness, and that one must die like Kabir to be claimed both by the Hindus and the Maahmmadans. Mahammadanism was iconoclastic and many of the latter day sects began to worship only the name of God such as the Sikhs, Satnamis, Nama panthis &c. India soon discovered that Islam never struck a note different from Hinduism. She was simply another expression of the Great common Asiatic sentiment, the same conception of the sublime unity of all life, the same renunciation and charity in essence.

Soon the dream of Akbar to build an Indian nation was shattered to pieces by the great but narrow-minded Aurangazib. With the decline of the Moghul empire a new civilization began to gain in power and influence and thus unsettle the mind of India. For never in the history of humanity was the East and the West brought together in such close contact as in the beginning of the 18th century. Teutonic energy with its passion for '*détail* ,

with its imperfectly assimilated Greek culture, with misunderstood Christianity, with its giants of science and politics, backed by Roman organisation entered the arena of Hindu life. Material well-being, the idolatry of the flesh, sordid utility and a critical and negative conception of life and liberty uncurbed by an inner moral law was just then tending to become the very essence of Western culture. Organic unity was being replaced by barren uniformity, the dead laws of matter were being substituted for the laws of the spirit. The real question that was being solved both in the East and the West was this, does duty consist in obeying one's nature or conquering it,—is life's purpose gained by satisfying one's wants, or by minimising them. The commercial West seemed to prefer the former course and produced in consequence the economic sciences. The spiritual East favoured the latter course and developed religion. If Arab civilization refined social life and democratised religion, European civilization with its commercial instinct and scientific dualism secularised life itself. National humiliation, commercial destruction, political plunder, and economic bankruptcy which denuded India of all material prosperity, annihilated all hopes of a terrestrial kingdom, prepared her to make another effort towards victory along her own line of strength, viz., religion and contribute her own note to the universal symphony. India became a seething furnace of diverse and apparently contradictory ideals, a medley of unfused ideas, a museum of races that could be harmonized only by a colossal mind. Thus a wave of materialism, of social reform, of political power, and religious fanaticism passed over India.

After revelling for two centuries in differentiation the people of India woke up and began to ask, how are we to unify the varied forces operating amidst us ? What place to give this utilitarian scientific culture of the West in the growing knowledge of the East ? What is the place of Islam and other religious sects in the Indian religious palace of pearls ? This was the problem of all the great minds of India in the beginning of the 19th century. Several solutions were offered, many attempts were made to destroy the differences and place society on a solid basis.

Some endeavoured to knock on the head of overgrown ritualism and to revert to the ancient primitive rites of the Vedas. They tried to drive everybody to follow a single formula—one form for all. Caste and other institutions that were considered to stand in the way of Indian solidarity were thrown overboard. Salvation was only in good works and the old school of the Mimamsakas was revived.

Others again, perceiving that it was foreign to the genius of the Asiatic to conform to a single religious form tried to overthrow all ritualism as an obstacle to Indian unity. Even Mahommed appears to have recognised this fact in human nature. "Whoever fails to follow now one tenth of what I preach will be a sinner, but there will come a time when whoever practises even one tenth will act righteously. If God had willed he could have made all of one religion, therefore do not condemn others' faiths, declares the Koran." These new reformers had the sagacity to perceive that society and religion could not progress

unless the former was built on the common and universal principles of religion. They found that the same truths pervaded more or less almost all the religions of the world, at bottom, the essence of them all was the same. Hence a sort of intellectual eclecticism based on the Upanishadic truths was preached. Dharma and Moksha were separated and it was hoped that all sectarianism would thereby be killed and social consolidation brought about. While calling on all to worship and adore the eternal, unsearchable, immutable Brahman, this new movement denounced Idolatry and ceremonial practices.

Another movement, Western in its inception, method and aspiration tried to stimulate thought and bring about unity by setting a premium upon man's love for mysticism.

It was while reforms of various kinds—religious, social and political were thus being inaugurated in India, as the turning point of Indian History, as the summation of Hindu thought, as the expression of the imperishable in perishable things, as a type, as an eternal ideal and therefore the most condensed expression of it, a child was born of poor Brahmin parents on the 20th Feb, 1835, in one of the wayside villages of Bengal. The Blessed Incarnation of Harmony had taken human shape. He inherited a rich store of purity, charity, piety and love from his orthodox parents. Nature seemed to have been more expressive of her purpose in the development of this wonderful boy. He himself seems to have been conscious of his mission from the very beginning. Even as a boy he repudiated secular learning and material advancement. For as he used to point out in his latter days, education and culture

are like the alluvial deposit on character, useful but not essential. What after all will it fetch man? "Some bread and butter. Does our secular education go far beyond this? Does it manufacture anything more than mere mediocrities in society? Does it not stunt all individuality? Here is what such a great authority as Renan says — "He was not possessed of any of those titles which, in the eyes of the vulgar, confer the privileges of knowledge. Nevertheless, it would be a great error to imagine that he was what we should call an ignorant man. Amongst us scholastic education draws a great distinction, in respect of personal worth, between those who have received it and those who have not had the opportunity. It was not so in the East, or anywhere, in the good old time. The state of ignorance in which, owing to our isolated and individualistic way of living, those amongst us remain who have not passed through the schools, is unknown in those societies where moral culture, and above all, the general spirit of the age, are transmitted by the perpetual contact of man with man. Refinement of manners and acuteness of intellect have, in the East, nothing in common with what we call education. It is the men of the schools, on the contrary, who are considered as being pedantic and wanting in manners. In a social state such as this, ignorance which with us condemns a man to an inferior position, is the condition of great things and high originality. Forsaking the commonplace ways of life to fulfil his great mission, he discarded that extended and varied learning which stultifies and weakens the mind, and resorted to the serenity of a

deep contemplation which preserves a free and child-like innocence, the only condition of true spirituality. Religion, therefore, was the one occupation of his life. In an age when the world cried down all spiritual idolatry, as if to demonstrate its glory and utility, circumstances compelled him to become a temple priest at Dakshineswar. 'Everything favors those who are marked by special destiny, they go on to glory by a kind of invincible impulse and command of fate. He had all his inspiration from his favorite idol Kali. Every man may be said to be the abstract of the whole life of a nation. Of this boy it was really and intensely so. He learnt from the stories he had heard from his infancy and the folk songs of his country that religion is *realisation*, that God can be seen and sensed, that renunciation is its best means. So he practised a sort of progressive renunciation, practically combating and destroying all love of worldly power, wealth and carnality. He became mad with this one idea—How to possess God? Time and place ceased to exist for him, heat and cold, hunger and thirst failed to impress him, he completely forgot himself. Everything of this life became suddenly puerile, vain, and powerless. Whole days and nights he spent unconscious of himself and the world around him. Everything dissolved in this one supreme quest. Is it real? Is it real? Does this idol that I worship own any reality beneath it? Sometimes as the night approached he would stand before his favorite Kali and cry 'One day is gone in vain, Mother, and Thou doest not come, one day of this short life is gone, and I have not known the Truth. Thus at last there came a moment,

a mighty moment of nothingness, of culmination of the perceptive powers of the race, when old Gadadhar had completely disappeared and Ramakrishna the World-Prophet occupied his place. He lived his remaining days in entire oblivion of the body idea. The little self completely disappeared and became the All. No more 'I' and 'Mine' but always Thou the Universal Mother and 'Thine'. Pointing to his body he used to say 'this abode or temple of my Mother'. He was no more, the actor, it was his Mother, the living force within that propelled him to act. Eternally grateful the world must be to that twice blessed woman, the ideal of Hindu womanhood, his wife and disciple, for it is she that by her unselfishness made a Ramakrishna possible.

Here closes the first chapter of his life. The genius of India is *Religion*, that of Europe is *culture*. He first realized all that is highest and best in the life and tradition of his country. He realized through the well established means of religion, the rapture of eternal union with the divine nature within, and perceived the whole of nature as himself. His love became so all comprehending that he could not bear the sight of any one treading even a blade of grass. So thoroughly did he realize the unity of things, so subtle had his mind become, that he could view things from a higher sphere and give each its proper place in the universal concord. All impressions were transformed in him into a pure melody tending towards dissolution into a higher Brahmic state thus revealing their intrinsic reality. His mind could pierce into the potentiality of all things and make them flush out their secrets. In short, Ramakrishna

became one with the mainspring of life itself—the *Akhanda Satchidananda*. His soul was always vibrating in unison with Eternal Joy.

Now begins the second part of his life and struggles. From the realisation of the *Nirguna Brahman* he descended to the study and realisation of the *Saguna Brahman*. All the religions of the world aim at realising the different personal aspects of the one impersonal Brahman of the Vedanta. All the religions of the world are concretised forms into which the one religion of the Vedanta has thrown itself throughout history. He used to say in his later days that it is much more difficult to realise God with form than without form. Perhaps because the one comes by the development of the mind and the other by the destruction of it, one by the affirmation and the other by the negation of the "Will". To put it in his own language, in the notes of the Gamut it is only in relation to the octave in the ascending or the descending scale that the full potentiality of the other notes can be grasped. Similarly, after removing sheath after sheath of this mysterious existence, after realizing that the Brahman is not the material universe, not the subtle *prana*, force, not the *manas*, not the *vyana*, no, not even the *ananda* but is behind and beyond all these, then and then only, in the descent, will one understand that the *ananda* is all *Brahman*, *vyana* is all *Brahman*, *manas* is all *Brahman*, *prana* is all *Brahman*, and *anna* is all *Brahman*. Such a man alone is above all the dreams and delusions of *Maya* and can in reality worship and enjoy the *Saguna Brahman* being attracted to it. He has to give up nothing, not

even this material world, for he sees the 'Whole estate in every atom, to him alone everything is real teeming with Brahman. Now that he has become the embodiment of Universal Mother, all the religionists of the world are his posterity and must be tinged with his mind. When in this condition, Sri Ramakrishna established by living other religions and the varied special forms of that of his own country, the universality of the Vedanta.

He sat under the feet of a Mahammadan saint, let his beard grow, ate Moslem food, resorted to Moslem places of worship and realised the Moslem conception of an all-powerful Allah. He bowed before the picture of Jesus and recognised His divine Sonship. He realized the ideals of Siva, of Krishna, of Rama, of the *parabhakti* of the Gopis, of the unselfish and divine service of Hanuman. Nothing that his magical mind touched but was made 'whole. Everything had their ascension and transfiguration in him. There is not a Tantrika worship that he did not purify, not a Puranic story whose meaning he did not live, not a precept of the Dharmasastras whose rationale he did not perceive, not an Upanishadic truth which he did not make his own. Ramakrishna was religion and religion was Ramakrishna. He was the synthesis of all thought, the meeting place of all ideals, the fulfilment of the Indian sages. "There was not a symbol in India that he had not worshipped and did not love, not a worshipper by whatever rite, whose special need he had not felt in his own nature, and borne till it was satisfied, not a prayer or ecstasy, or vision that he did not reverence and understand and give

it its true place in a growing knowledge. Nothing short of absolute perfection ever satisfied him, in his own words "so long I learn so long I live." His spirit yearned for the salvation of all and accordingly it equipped itself. His was in fact the most perfect religious culture that mind can conceive. Before the Parliament of Religions was even dreamt of, here was a man who was a Parliament of Religions in himself, before the full application of the comparative and historical methods to Science and Languages was achieved, here was one who made a practical application of it to religion. Ramakrishna realised the solid unity of the universe and that in and through everything in the universe, the *Atman* functions. Not an atom in the universe lives isolated and can move without dragging the whole universe along with it. To-day the world is talking of the Parliament of man and the Federation of the world. To-day Europe is out-growing the idea of nationality, is feeling that no question can be solved on national or racial lines and so always talks of the international. Everything must have a universal solution. His was the most universal mind known to history. How many æons of struggles and failures, how many silent epochs of great efforts must have preceded the accomplishment of each of the great Religious ideals of the world. Yet in this short span of half a century of life this divine man lived the whole religious life of Asia. He is said to have attained to 19 *Bhava Samadhis*. Nature endowed him with a gigantic body to withstand these tremendous shocks.

Out of his intense love for mankind, he gave to the

world the fruits of his tremendous experience. Here his mission for humanity begins. And what is his message? It is the vital truth that the religions of the world are neither antagonistic nor contradictory, but they are different aspects of the one Religion Eternal—*Sanatana Dharma*. The pure light of the One Infinite Religion of the *Vedanta* breaks forth into a thousand rain-bow colors as it refracts through the prism of time, space and individual powers. It is the historical task of every religion to change its standpoint with every fresh metamorphosis. The same God answers all. Unity in variety is the plan of the universe, a unity of purpose and a variety of means, there is one cause at the core and multiple effects at the fringe. The Paramahansa demonstrated that the goal of every atom in the universe is *Mukti*. But as long as different natures are born in this world, with different tendencies, they require different forms, different applications of the same Truth. Thus once again the glorious doctrine of *Ishta* or freedom in worship was emphasised. Every individual has a right to choose his own ideal and methods. This teaching was not a mere intellectual theory but a hard earned conviction, the result of Realization. The doctrine that all religions lead to the same goal is in India as old as the Vedas themselves. "Not by reading the Vedas, not by renunciation, not by charity, but all by all ways lead to Him," says the Rigveda. "Whoever worships Me in whatever form I reach him, they are all struggling through paths which in the end always lead to Me", says the Gita. But is this Brahmin preached it, with a gigantic practical perception of everything, extending it

even to non Aryan religions, it becomes the bounden duty of every man to follow his own faith in its entirety, and the teaching is unique in the history of the world. Even the weaknesses of every religion have a place in the organic unity of that faith and help the followers in gaining the ultimate goal, and serve as wings in the flight to blessedness. Man therefore always passes from one truth to another truth and not from error to truth for there can be no untruth in the divine economy.

How did he give the world the accumulated treasure of a whole life of rigid discipline? Gently like the dew of the dawn, unknown, unfelt, making the fairest roses bud. He repudiated the title of a teacher for he always said,—“It is my Mother that speaks and works, what have I to do with it?” His principle was, as we have already pointed out, that education is only the external whitewash. Character is the essential thing. First form character, earn spirituality, then even without your own seeking you will be a blessing to mankind. As he used to say “when the lotus opens, the bees come of their own accord to seek the honey, so let the lotus of thy character be full blown and results will follow.” Be and make, deed not word, that was his motto. ‘In religion as in art precept is nothing and practice is everything. Truth is only of value when it is realized in the world of fact. Religion therefore is not in books and temples, it is not thinking and theorising, but it is being and becoming. It is a personal evolution, from animality to humanity and from humanity to spirituality. Religion is life, an eternal fight between the lower

and higher self. He moulded those that gathered around him by living the life with them. And what a life! What a man! A life so profoundly original, with its conception of human dignity, with its actual possession of the finite and infinite, with its perfect emancipation from the senses and all which passes away, with its infallible clearness of self-vision, with its autocracy of the hyper-conscious, with its raptures of prayers, ecstasies of devotion, losing all being in one being and a nature divine, Himalayan, complete, harmonious and perfect, penetrate the mind of every one with joy and the heart with gratitude. These glimpses into the inner nature of this great soul, ought to do one much practical good. Contact of this kind strengthens, restores and refreshes, courage and hope returns that we too can be men, we too can attain freedom.

His child-like simplicity, his unullied purity, his marvellous sincerity and profound insight made his presence a perpetual access to the Real. He criticised nothing but always lifted up the image of the real before the eyes and men corrected themselves. No more condemnation of anybody. His sympathy extended to all. Truly does the poet express him when he says,

Creed and race

Shall bear false witness, each of each no more
But find their limits by that larger light,
And overstep them moving easily
Thro' after-ages in the love of Truth
The truth of Love

So long as life is based on sincerity and purity, no circumstance of birth, or country or caste or creed will stand between

it and God. He had the peculiar knack of pressing the secret spring of every nature, gently would he lift the veil from before the mind's eye, light up the background and every man felt in his presence a deep sense of spirituality welling up within, not as the result of rigorous logic, not as the convincing force of another's intellect but as a natural and spontaneous transformation from within.

All came to him to receive his blessings. To those who condemned all ritualism as mere growths and consequently obstructive, he pointed out that the relation between the essence and form is that between rice and its husk. As without the husk no rice can be grown, so without rites no religion is possible. As different grains have different kinds of husk so different religions have different forms. Any attempt to convert all to one form is also an impossibility. For variety is life and uniformity is death. Unity can be gained not by conversion but by federation, not one form for all but one may be so developed in any one that he will be enabled to place himself in all and realize the All as the all in all. The highly intellectual reformer had his gentle correction. The redemption of the head is inferior to the redemption of the heart. Intellect can go only some distance but it is the heart that can pierce through the deepest mysteries. Further, the government of the world never belongs to the philosophic mind but to the man of emotion and action, to one who creates, affirms and acts. It is sanctity and not philosophy that will satisfy the multitude. In his own way, he would say, the sages can go only up to the gates of the divine harem, but Lakshmi (Bhakti) can go even into the

innermost apartment. If any body condemned this world and its gains in his presence too much he would gently say, "There can be no Narayana without Lakshmi. He would tell the story of a tantrika worshipper. There is a tantrik rite in which the worshipper in the dead of night sits on a dead body and meditates. At a certain stage of worship, it is said the dead body rises. If some food is not thrust then into its mouth it will destroy the meditator. Sitting on the carcase of this world, if efforts are not made to satisfy the needs arising out of it, no spirituality can be acquired. To those who condemned idolatry he would say, "Why does the image bring to your mind the conception of a stone and not the great idea symbolized by it? It is not the object but the idea that is helpful. To the atheist he would point out that human dignity will never be saved by the doubter. Therefore, believe in something, in purity or sincerity and you will help yourself and brother man. Even political philosophers can draw their own lessons from this life. Politics can never filter down to the masses unless dissolved in religion. Indian unity must be raised right out of the level of a common political life and must be raised to the force and dignity of religion and have an ethical sanction behind it.

The last few years of his life were an unceasing ministration to the salvation of his fellow-men. People used to go to him by the hundreds to breathe once at least the holy atmosphere of his divine presence, and he would teach them without the least regard for his bodily condition. Even while he was suffering, when speech itself was agony he would still teach, for he is said to have

